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O.T.]

1887

(1887)

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HARVARD UNIVERSITY.



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THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY

DEVOTED TO

Literature, Science, Art, and Politics

VOLUME LIX.—NUMBER 355

MAY, 1887

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JAN 14 1922

Hutterbüchel.

By Miss Thorne Miller.

1887.]

French and English.

677

Some of them come to the Lyons of miracles and seek charity; these come to Fourvières.¹ But thou, good workman, wilt come to the hill of labor, the serious Croix Rousse. The part in the banquet which thou desirest is bread won by thine own hands." I was reminded of these words of Michelet when, at Lyons, I said to a mechanic who was working on Sunday, "This task prevents you from going to mass." The man paused an instant in his labor, looked up at me seriously, and answered, "It is not my custom to go to mass. He who works prays." He then resumed his prayer with hearty strokes of a hammer.

As in England London is a kind of nation in itself, so in France we have the nation of Paris. The word is so little of an exaggeration that Paris has often, on the most momentous occasions, acted quite independently of the country, and did actually proclaim its right to autonomy under the Commune, whilst the constant effort of the municipal council ever since has been to erect itself into a parliament at the Hôtel de Ville, and have its own way in spite of the assemblies at the Palais Bourbon or the Luxembourg.

The Parisian nation has not the same characteristics as the nation of Londoners. The distinguishing character of London is not to be local, but world-wide; the character of Paris is to be as local as ancient Athens, and as contemptuous of all that lies outside. It is commonly believed that Paris is France, but how can it be France when it is so utterly unlike the provinces? This error comes from the foreigners' habit of staying in Paris only, so that Paris is very really and truly all France to them, being the only France they know. Yet the character of the French capital, so far from being representative, is all its own. Here, for example, is a striking and permanent peculiarity. France is not, gen-

erally speaking, an artistic country. In the provinces few care for art or know anything about it, whereas Paris is the most artistic city in Europe; and that not simply as the place where pictures and statues are produced in the greatest numbers, and architects find most employment, but as the place where the art-sentiment is most generally developed, so that it runs over into a thousand minor channels, till the life of the capital is saturated with it. In the provinces the whole estimate of human worth is different. There the recognized superiorities are either aristocracy (true or false), or else simply money, reputation being nearly, if not entirely, valueless; but in Paris reputation has a greater relative value than anywhere else, — greater even than in London. In the provinces there is a dull contentment with ignorance; in Paris always a desire to know, or a pretension to know, though the desire may not be realized or the pretension justified. In the country the disposition is not, usually, very open or hospitable; in Paris it is remarkably frank, easy, and cordial, and as hospitable as the narrow lodgings permit. In rural France, as a general rule, people neither understand nor practice the kind of intercourse that is lightly agreeable without involving much beyond the passing hour; in Paris this kind of intercourse is habitual. The Parisians establish this distinction between themselves and others, that they are intelligent and all provincials stupid; the provincials usually believe themselves to be more moral and more serious than the inhabitants of Paris. Sometimes they have self-respect enough to repudiate the idea that in order to be intelligent it is necessary to live within the circle of the fortifications, but more frequently they admit that provincial life is dull without making any effort to enliven it, and they speak of Paris as the Paradise from

Michelet wrote, a gorgeous new church has been built there for the miracle-working Virgin.

¹ The place on the steep on the right bank of the Saône, behind the cathedral. Since

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which all intelligent French people, living out of it, are exiles. Notwithstanding their apparent levity, I am told by all who are competent to form an opinion that the Parisians study better than the provincials. The ordinary level attained in all studies is much higher in Paris than in the provincial cities. The Parisians are the most laborious and best disciplined art-students in Europe. In the French University the best professors are reserved for Paris, or pro-

moted to the capital in course of time, and they all say that the boys work better there than in the provinces.

I have mentioned elsewhere the curious but general French superstition that Paris is the light, not only of France, but of the world, and that all literary and artistic reputations are nothing till they have received the sanction of Parisian approval. Only imagine Paris judging between poets whose languages it is unable to pronounce!

Philip Gilbert Hamerton.

58, 4/12.

FLUTTERBUDGET.

"FLUTTERBUDGET" is the one expressive word that exactly characterizes a certain brown thrush, or thrasher, the subject of a year's study. This bird is perhaps the only restless creature that bears the name of thrush, and he is totally unlike the rest of his family, having neither dignity, composure, nor repose of manner. My brown thrush, however, was exceedingly interesting in his own way, if only as a study of perpetual motion, of the varieties of shape and attitude possible to him, and the fantastic tricks upon wing of which he was capable. One never tired of watching him, for he was erratic in every movement, always inventing some new sort of evolution, or a fresh way of doing the old things, and scarcely a moment at rest. A favorite exercise was flying across the room, planting his feet flatly against the side wall, turning instantly and flying back. This he often did a dozen times in succession. His feet were always "used to save his head" (contrary to our grandmothers' teachings). When he made the usual attempt to fly through the window on his first outing in the room, he went feet first against it, and thus saved himself a bumped head. His movements were

abrupt in the extreme, and always so unexpected that he frequently threw the whole feathered family into a panic, apparently without the least intention of doing so. Standing beside the cage of another bird, he would wheel quickly and face the other way, absolutely nothing more, but doing this in a manner so startling that the occupant of the cage scolded roundly. He specially delighted in clambering all over the cage of a goldfinch, acting as if he should tear it in pieces, and greatly annoying the small bird. He often flew up the side of the window casing, as though climbing it like a ladder, his feet touching it now and then, and he did the same on the curtains of coarse net. Again he flew across the room before the three windows, turning to each one in turn, planted his feet squarely on the linen shade, as on the wall above-mentioned, and without a pause passed to the end of the room, and touched it with his feet in the same strange way. Often when standing for the moment perfectly still before a window, he suddenly flew up, put both feet in this unbirdlike way against the window shade, turned and went to his cage. In like manner he came in contact with a cage, the books

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on the shelves, the back of a chair, or any piece of furniture, taking from that point a new direction. When startled he instantly bounded into the air as though the ground were hot under his feet, and often turned a corner or two before he came down. In the middle of his most lovely song he was quite likely, without the least warning, to make a mad dash somewhere, turn a sharp corner, dive in another direction, and alight on the spot he had left a moment before, and all in so spasmodic a way that every bird was panic-stricken.

The thrasher was exceedingly wary, and nothing was droller than his manner of approaching anything, whether a worm I had thrown on the matting for him, or the bathing-dish. In the case of the worm, the moment he saw his prey — which I selected for its liveliness — he came to a nearer perch, and stood there a few minutes, posturing, shaking his plumage in great excitement, looking at me and then at the tempting object. Very soon he dropped to the floor, and started towards the worm in the funniest way; running a few steps, stopping short and turning half around, ready for instant flight, flirting his feathers with a great rustle, turning an anxious eye on me, then on the wriggling attraction, running a step or two, and repeating the performance. In this way he advanced very gradually till near enough to half encircle his prey; or to run and hop sideways as though to describe a circle, turning away at each pause as before, all the time jerking and fluttering in intense agitation, and always keeping an eye on me. Not that he was in the least afraid of me; it was simply his sensational way of doing everything. When he finally came within reach of the worm, he snatched it, and ran as though the enemy were upon him.

His performances before entering the bath were even more amusing. The bathing-dish, a broad, deep plate, stood upon a towel on a table. The bird

alighted on the table, and began first to peck the towel, pulling the fringe, working at any loose thread he discovered, and industriously enlarging any small hole he chanced to find. In thus doing he often turned over the edge, when he sprang back as though he had seen a ghost. Recovering from the shock, he circled around the dish with little hops, occasionally giving a gentle peck at the edge of the dish, or a snip at the water with his beak. Thus he waltzed around the bath perhaps forty times, now and then going so far as to jump up on the edge, make a dash at the water, and back off as if it were hot, or to give a hop into the middle of the water and out again so quickly that one could hardly believe he touched it. When, after all this ceremony, he did go in to stay, he made most thorough work, splashing in a frantic way, as though he had but a moment to stay, and in one minute getting more soaked than many birds ever do. After this short dip he dashed out, flew to a perch, and in the maddest way jerked and shook himself dry; pulling his feathers through his beak with a snap, and making a peculiar sound which I can liken only to the rubbing of machinery that needs oil.

The brown thrush was never so violent and eccentric in movement as just after his bath. Allowing himself often but a moment's hasty shake of plumage, he darted furiously across the room, startling every bird, and alighting no one could guess where. Then, after more jerks and rapid shakings, he flung himself as unexpectedly in another direction, while at every fresh turn birds scattered wildly, everywhere, anywhere, out of his way, bringing up in the most unaccustomed places; as, for instance, a dignified bird, who never went to the floor, coming to rest under the bed, or a ground-lover flattened against the side of a cage. All this disturbance seemed to please the thrasher, for he had a spice of mischief in his composition. A never

failing diversion was teasing a goldfinch. He began his pranks by entering the cage and hammering on the tray, or digging into the seed in a savage way that sent it flying out in a shower, which result so entertained him that I was forced to close the door when the owner was out. This the thrush resented, and he next took to jumping against the side of the cage, clinging a moment, then bouncing off with so much force that the cage rocked violently. Then he placed himself on the perch by the door, and pounded, and pulled, and jerked, and shook the door till, if the owner were home, he was nearly wild. Having exhausted that amusement, he jumped on the top, and in some way jarred the cage roughly. To protect it I made a cover of paper, but, contrary to my intentions, this afforded the rogue a new pleasure, for he soon found that by tramping over it he could make a great noise, and he quickly learned the trick of tearing the paper into pieces, and uncovering the little fellow, who, by the way, was not in the least afraid, but simply enraged and insulted, and when outside stood and faced his tormentor, blustering and scolding him well.

Tearing paper was always amusing to the brown thrush. I have seen him take his stand near the wall, peck at the paper till he found a weak spot where it would yield and break, then take the torn edge in his bill and deliberately tear it a little. It was "snatching a fearful joy," however, for the noise always startled him. First came a little tear, then a leap one side, another small rent, another panic; and so he went on till he had torn off a large piece which dropped to the floor, while I sat too much interested in the performance to think of saving the paper. (The room and its contents are always secondary to the birds' comfort and pleasure, in my thoughts.) A newspaper on the floor furnished him amusement for hours, picking it to pieces, tearing pictures, from which he always

first pecked the faces, dragging the whole about the floor to hear it rattle and to scare himself with. A pile of magazines on a table made a regular playground for him, his plan being to push and pull at the back of one till he got it loose from the rest, and then work at it till it fell to the floor. He never failed to reduce the pile to a disreputable-looking muss.

The bird was as fond of hammering as any woodpecker, on the bottom of his cage, on perches, on the floor, even on his food; and his leaps or bounds without the apparent help of his wings were extraordinary. Not infrequently I have seen him spring into the air just high enough to see me over my desk, — three feet at least, — probably to satisfy himself as to my whereabouts, and drop instantly back to his work or play.

This amusing bird was also intelligent. He understood perfectly well what I wanted when I spoke to him; that is, he had a guilty consciousness when in mischief that translated my tone to him. Also he recognized instantly a bird out of place, as, for instance, one on the floor which usually frequented the perches and higher parts of the room; and having taken upon himself the office of regulator, he always went after a bird thus out of his accustomed beat. When I talked to the thrasher, he answered me not only with a rough-breathing sound, a sort of prolonged "ha-a-a," but with his wings as well. Of course this is not uncommon in birds, but none that I have seen use these members so significantly as he did. His way was to lift the wing nearest me, sometimes very slightly, sometimes to a perpendicular position, but only one wing, and only after I made a remark. This exhibition was curious and interesting, and I often prolonged my talk to see the variety he could give to this simple motion. His wings were always expressive, in alighting in a new place, or where he suspected there might be danger or a surprise;

the moment his feet touched he lifted one or both wings quite high, dropping them at once.

A more lithe body than that of the brown thrush I have never seen in feathers; he could assume as many attitudes as he had emotions. He often stood on a perch and postured for a long time, as if greatly excited and meditating some mad deed, and I must confess he usually carried out the intention. Not only was he able to put his body into all possible shapes, but he had extraordinary command of his feathers. He could erect them on any one part alone, on the top of the head, the shoulders, the back, or the chin. He often raised the feathers just above the tail, letting that member hang straight down, giving him the appearance of being chopped square off.

The song of this bird is well known and quite celebrated; indeed, in the Southern States he is called the French mocking-bird, as only second to the mocking-bird proper. My bird never sang above a whisper, one may say; that is, he never opened his mouth to let out the sound, though he was extremely fond of singing, indulging in it by the hour. He hardly paused for eating, or flying, or hopping around on the floor, but dropped sweet notes in between the mouthfuls, and kept up the warble through all movements.

As dusk came on the brown thrush began a wonderful series of postures, more peculiar and varied than one would suppose possible to so large and apparently clumsy a bird. Sometimes he stretched up very tall, then instantly crouched as if about to spring; one moment he turned his head downward as though to dive off, then wheeled and faced the other way; now he drew his body out long to a point, head and tail exactly on a level, then head and tail thrust up, making his back the shape of a bow; at one time he threw his head back as though about to turn a back-somersault, then scraped his bill, shook

himself out, and made the harsh breathing I have spoken of; in another moment he spread his tail like a fan, and instantly closed it again; then turned his head on one side very far, while his tail hung out the other side, and in this odd position jerked himself along by short jumps the whole length of his perch. Between the postures and on every occasion he scraped his bill violently. Next began movements: first he ran down his three perches, across the floor, and hopped to the upper one from the outside, touching his feet to the wires as he went, so rapidly that my eyes could not follow him; then he alighted on the perch with a graceful flop of one wing, sometimes also bowing his head several times, and uttering the breathing sound each time. Again he jumped from the upper perch to one directly under it, and returned the same way by a very peculiar motion: standing on the lower perch, he turned his head over his shoulder, and sprang back and up at the same time, landing in exactly the same position on the perch above, with perfect ease and grace.

Nothing pleased the thrasher more than watching other birds: he observed them closely, especially liking to stand on top of a cage and see the life below, — an agitated life it was apt to be when he was there. Thus he sometimes stood on the goldfinch's cage, and noticed every motion with great interest, yet with an indescribably ironical air, as if he said, "My dear sir, is *that* the way you eat?" He showed particular interest in seed-eating birds, apparently not understanding how they could enjoy such food. Though full of bluster and pretense, he was as gentle as any bird in the room, never presumed on his size as the biggest, and, though liking to tease and worry, never really touching one. The smallest only needed to stand and face him to see that it was all bluster and fun.

All this until spring began to stir his

blood and tempt him occasionally, after long posturing and many feints, to deliver a gentle dig at a neighbor's ribs. Now, too, he began to show interest in out-of-doors, standing on the window-sash and looking out, which is the familiar sign that a bird's time to depart has come. In his case I did not think it necessary to carry him to the park to liberate him, for I was sure he could take care of the sparrows and protect himself, — and so it proved. When he found himself suddenly on a tall tree in the street, and

before he recovered from his surprise, those disreputable birds gathered around him to see what he was like. They soon found out: he quickly recovered himself, made a wild dash that scattered them like leaves before the wind, and then planted himself on a branch to await another attempt. But sparrows, though saucy, are knowing, and not one came near him again. They had quite satisfied their curiosity, and after a few moments' waiting the brown thrush went on his way rejoicing.

Olive Thorne Miller.

THE SECOND SON.

XVII.

BROTHERS.

THE two brothers lived in the same chambers, though they did not see very much of each other; for Roger generally was not out of bed when Edmund went out, and Edmund had retired to his room before Roger came in at night. They were in different "sets." Roger, whom society held as the more desirable of the two Mitfords, though inferior in many ways to the third, had been sucked into a very usual, very commonplace round of engagements, which, without any pleasure to speak of, to himself or any one else, kept him perpetually occupied, and in the condition of, which it is said of a man that he cannot call his soul his own. But it so happened that on this night, of all nights, Roger had an engagement which he disliked particularly, or else he had a headache, or something else had happened which made him break off abruptly for once in a way from that absorbing round; and to the astonishment and temporary embarrassment of both brothers, the elder came in while the younger was still lin-

gering, smoking a cigarette, over the dying fire, which was not out of place even in the beginning of May.

"Hallo! is that you, Roger?" said Edmund; and "Hallo! are you still there, Ned?" said Roger. These were their only salutations, though they had not met all day.

"Yes, I'm still here," said Edmund, poking the fire to give himself a countenance; "naturally — it's not quite twelve o'clock."

"I did n't know that it was so early," Roger replied with some embarrassment, bringing forward his favorite easy-chair.

"Some of your engagements fallen through? By the way, I thought you were to be at the Stathams' to-night?"

"Ned," returned the elder brother, with a seriousness which perhaps was partly put on to veil other feelings, "when girls do run amuck in society, it's appalling the pace they go. I've laughed at it, perhaps, in other families, but by Jove, when it's a little thing you've seen in long clothes, or short petticoats" —

"Gerry?" said Edmund, looking up, with the poker still in his hand.

Roger only nodded as he threw him-

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